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WHY BOTHER TO TEACH CRITICAL READING SKILLS TO COLLEGE READING CLASSES.

BY- LEE, WAYNE D.

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A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON CRITICAL READING INDICATES THAT EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO TEACH CRITICAL READING AT BOTH THE SECONDARY AND ELEMENTARY LEVELS, PARTICULARLY AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL. NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE YEARBOOKS AND REVIEWS OF REPORTED RESEARCH, HOWEVER, FAILED TO SHOW A SINGLE CONTROLLED STUDY ON CRITICAL READING AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL. NOT ONE OF THE 61 DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS ON COLLEGE READING DONE BETWEEN 1918 AND 1960 WAS ON CRITICAL READING. ON THE OTHER HAND, TWO RECENT VOLUMES OF "READING RESEARCH QUARTERLY" CITED FIVE STUDIES REPORTED IN JOURNALS OTHER THAN READING JOURNALS WHICH WERE CONDUCTED BY NONREADING SPECIALISTS. ALL THESE FINDINGS SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS--(1) THAT ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY READING TEACHERS BELIEVE THAT CRITICAL READING CAN BE TAUGHT, (2) THAT NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE MEMBERS FAIL TO PUT PROPER EMPHASIS ON THE TEACHING OF CRITICAL READING, AND (3) THAT COLLEGE READING TEACHERS DO NOT TEACH CRITICAL READING IN THEIR COURSES. SINCE THERE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH WRITING DONE ON WAYS OF ORGANIZING AND TEACHING CRITICAL READING, THERE IS NEED FOR MORE EXPERIMENTATION, PREFERABLY BY READING SPECIALISTS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE (TAMPA, NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 2, 1967). (NS)

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WHY BOTHER TO TEACH CRITICAL READING SKILLS TO COLLEGE READING CLASSES?

Wayne D. Lee, Associate Professor

Western Washington State College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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WHY BOTHER TO TEACH CRITICAL READING SKILLS TO COLLEGE READING CLASSES?

Over forty years have passed since the inception of instruction in reading skills for college students. During nearly five decades we have seen many changes in both the requirements for successful college work and the expectation of curriculum instructors. More students are required to have depth of understanding in more areas of learning than at any other time in history. We are told that the accrued total of learning doubles every eight years. If this statement is true, then many of our students will need to have better techniques for study than they are getting at the present time.

Returning to the question asked in the title of this paper, "Why bother to teach critical reading skills to college reading classes?" What reading skills will your students need to be able to perform adequately tomorrow? Next week? Next year? Ten or twenty years from now? Can we know for sure? Generally, we can predict most of their reading needs for the future. However, we can not predict with absolute certainty. Perhaps the skill most useful to them then will be the one most neglected.

To begin my treatise, allow me to discuss the years students have prior to their college experiences. Since the reading classes usually taught in college today are the result of failures in skill development of earlier years, it seems appropriate to discern what work has been done in the teaching of critical reading skills at this earlier level. I want to start by giving you my first assumption.

Assumption one. Elementary and Secondary reading teachers believe that critical reading skills can be taught to their classes. It seems that this assumption may be the key to what I am trying to accomplish in this paper. Williams (15) reported a study in which ten different basal series were surveyed to determine what critical reading skills were incorporated with the skill development of these texts. She found no less than 33 skills that she interpreted to be critical reading skills in the total accumulation of the ten series. Of course, not all 33 appeared in any one series and the number total per series varied. The point to recognize here is that effort has been made toward teaching critical reading skills.

In preparing this paper several years of back issues of journals devoted to reading have been reviewed. I found several instances where some instructor or researcher has set up a controlled study to determine the success or failure of his effort to teach critical reading skills in elementary classrooms. You may think that these skills are more appropriately taught during the elementary grades. Perhaps, teachers can construct easier situations where the class can function with a research procedure in an elementary classroom. However, we need to look beyond the elementary classroom to the secondary school to find what efforts have been made at this level. What do we find reported in the literature. We find practically the same thing. In fact, although I did not keep a tally of the research efforts for elementary and secondary, it seems that more effort was placed in the teaching of critical reading skills at the secondary level than at the elementary level. Each year Robinson and his co-authors (10) have reported the research of work done in reading at the secondary level. Some aspect of critical reading

has been reported for the last eight years. I believe that the evidence reported and much more unreported here supports my first assumption. Without question efforts are being made to teach these skills in elementary and secondary classrooms. Many secondary and elementary teachers believe that critical reading skills can be developed by their students and report that this is being done.

My second assumption should be an affront to most of us here today. It follows. Members of the National Reading Conference do not place a proper emphasis on the teaching of critical reading skills.

A study of the yearbooks since the inception of the Southwest Reading Conference (National Reading Conference), to my knowledge, has not reported one research in which an investigation of critical reading skills has been the main focus for consideration. Surveys, diagnosis, methodology, problems, descriptions, and evaluations were the main topics considered for several years. We were unable to find one article at the college level where critical reading was the prime topic to be considered in the research reported by Bliesmer (3).

The early conferences rightly were occupied with the practical applications of "how to" organize and institute a college reading program. Later conferences shifted to the direction of more intellectual aspects of college reading. William Eller (4) reported in 1956 that "the present concern is with the more intellectual comprehension skills—the ones that are essential to high-level comprehension . . ." Although Eller's report gave

promise, there is little indication, if any, that this concern was actually taking place in the college reading class. A search through all the yearbooks, without exception, fails to show a controlled study where an effort was made to develop critical reading skills by a college reading class instructor. Yet, during many of these years Eller and others reported ways to organize and teach critical reading in college reading classes. It is as if at meetings college reading instructors were saying "yes, we believe that there is a skill known as critical reading but this has no place in my college reading classes."

Now, let me state my third assumption. College reading teachers do not teach critical reading skills.

Our sister organization, the College Reading Association, in which many who are present here today have membership, has had annual programs for several years where the teaching of critical reading skills was discussed, planned, and encouraged. Martha Maxwell (8) in 1963 made a call for higher level study skills, including critical reading. She recognized the paucity of work-books and materials delineating skills necessary for more advanced students. Can we see any significant change today as a result of this clarion call? I confess that I have been unable to find much change. In 1965 Walter Pauk (9) listed 20 specific reading skills students must master if they are to be critical readers. Have these factors of critical reading skill development been employed to implement programs in which critical reading was the chief objective? It seems to me that college reading specialists could use some of these skills suggested to start with in preparing and reporting studies in critical reading. Yet, where are the

programs that are placing a major emphasis upon the development of critical reading skills?

I may be belaboring this point but the 61 doctoral dissertations in college reading: 1918 to October 1960 (13) reported in Summer 1961 did not have one title where the major emphasis was to research critical reading. No, I do not feel that my assumption has been made carelessly. College reading instructors, in general, do not bother to teach critical reading skills in their college reading classes. At least critical reading is not a major emphasis of instruction.

We have been looking at all of <u>those other</u> instructors up until now. Let us look at ourselves for a few minutes. You have come here from various colleges and universities across the nation. You have left your classes to be present here today. Did you emphasize some aspect of critical reading skill development in your classes this week? How about last week? Have you emphasized critical reading skill development at all this semester?

To leave this paper at this point would be the same as reciting what has been done before. Perhaps, even what I say now has been said before. If so, it needs to be said again and again until we become cognizant of our own responsibility. Critical reading is the logical extension of structural skills and follows the interdependent structural skills. In our reading classes, somehow, we never get to the level of teaching critical reading. This may be due to the fact that our major efforts have been devoted to a salvage operation. Yet, this writer (7) in reporting on research conducted in 1963 found that over 40 per

cent of the students in his study were, when admitted to college reading classes, at average or above average inareading ability. Logically, these 377 students could have profited from much emphasis upon learning critical reading skills. Why are we failing to provide for the needs of the top two-thirds of our classes? Is our failure to teach critical reading skills in our classes due to the fact that our atmosphere in class is not loaded with meanings and suggestions and a time for interpretation? Heilman (6) recognised our need in this area, as have other, when he wrote "failure to deal with how to teach critical reading has for years been the stumbling block of college-adult reading conferences and publications. Again, this year we face this issue. I submit that many college reading class instructors know how to teach critical reading skills but are afraid to tackle the task of implementing it in their classes.

As in many areas of study, a high intelligence does not guarantee that a student has already achieved the ability to think and read critically. Critical reading can be taught, but to know how to teach critical reading is not enough. Students need training and guidance in its use. Eller (5) come to our aid when he lists several broad implications concerning critical reading. One implication is most appropriate to what I am trying to foster. Eller writes that "research workers who are specialists in reading instruction should conduct experiments which parallel many of the studies cited . . ." He refers to higher order comprehension skills. Merely making an assignment in a workbook that pertains to critical reading skill development points out a way an instructor fails to demand a high quality of reading.

Beasley (2) reported a study as far back as 1959 in which he identified critical reading development as one of eight principal objectives in the study. This one study reported in a reading journal should confirm to us that this type research can be planned and implemented.

Five studies pertaining to some aspect of critical reading have been reported (11) in the two volumes of the Reading Research Quarterly. These studies were conducted in college classes by people not known as reading specialists. These studies were reported in journals not known as reading journals. Does this mean that reading specialists are not concerned, or so little concerned, about the teaching of critical reading skills that other areas of professional training are taking up where we have abdicated our responsibility? Perhaps, it does. However, it is time that we resume our responsibilities in this area and start immediately to rectify our negligence by planning programs where critical reading is given more emphasis. You do not need me to tell you how to teach critical reading skills. There has been more than enough written on how to teach critical reading skills at college level. What we need is more people with enough courage to try.

Let me conclude by paraphrasing Artley (1), "the level the student sets for himself in reading critically will be as high as his reading instructor helps him set."

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